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ABSTRACT

Nonverbal talk is presented as a legitimate language form of importance to teachers. Examples of how gestures, facial expressions, and the use of personal space communicate not only ideas but also emotions and reactions are given. In addition, the use of body language as an important accessory to speech is discussed, as it expands communication between people of different cultures and backgrounds. (JD)

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NON VERBAL TALK IN THE CLASSROOM

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND THE ERIC SYSTEM CONTRACTORS"

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Mr. Prestwick leaned forward in his chair. Pulling at his chin, he focused intently on Juanita, one student in a group of four with whom he was discussing the group's project activity. Juanita was describing to him how the group intended to present its project report to the class. As Mr. Prestwick listened, his expression changed from wistful conjecture to enthusiasm. Only once did a slight frown cross his face. As Juanita hastened to explain, the frown disappeared.

At a prolonged pause in Juanita's explanation, Mr. Prestwick nodded approvingly, stood up, walked slowly toward his desk, picked up a book, returned to the group and opening the book, held it so the students could see. "Here is another way of presenting data," he said, pointing to a time line on the page. At that point, Mr. Prestwick glanced at Bill, who was with another group but had turned his head towards Mr. Prestwick, and gestured at the boy. Bill asked whether in their case the line could be drawn as a spiral to show the effect of the inventions being plotted on the expanding life style of the people. Mr. Prestwick responded with an open-eyed smile and a nod. "It just might work," he said, "try several sketches." That he was pleased with the idea showed now in his broad grin and relaxed manner.

Then Mr. Prestwick pulled on his chin, sat back in his chair, and thought for a moment. Pointing to the tape recorder in the corner, he queried, "Thought about taping some of your findings?"

The youngsters shook their heads. Juanita replied, "We thought we'd stick to transparencies to report to the class."

No reaction from Mr. Prestwick. He was gazing across the room at a group of three boys who were fooling around. He made a wide gesturing motion with his arm in the direction of the boys. When he got no return signal, he

stood up abruptly, strode over to them, looked intently at each and said, "Hey fellas - quit fooling about!" He stood looking down for a moment, letting his gaze move sternly from one face to the next. He slowly shook his head and added: "Back to work." Before he turned, the slightest smile crossed his face - a smile that almost said, "You're okay guys."

What are the many messages communicated in this episode? What are the various forms in which they are encoded and conveyed. How are they decoded by the receivers?

The thesis of this paper is that non verbal talk an example of which has been encoded here is a legitimate, persistent and frequently used language form of all peoples and therefore ought to be of central concern in a curriculum for both student and teacher. I hope to present an analysis of non verbal talk as a language form worthy of study and thereby provide some justification for its intentional inclusion in a school's program. For my analysis I have drawn heavily upon Philip Phenix's conceptualization of curriculum.

NON VERBAL TALK AS A LANGUAGE FORM

Based on his analysis of the nature of knowledge and also from his examination of the distinctive modes of human understanding, Phenix builds a framework for curriculum that determines its oughts as laying within six realms of meaning. The first of these is symbolics within which non-verbal talk, described as a nondiscursive symbolic form is categorised along with "ordinary language" (forms of literal discourse) and mathematics. Of the six realms, this realm is seen as the most fundamental "realm of meaning" for human understanding since symbolic forms must be used to express meanings in all other areas of the curriculum. The symbolic forms of ordinary language and mathematics are discursive because they are used to communicate ideas in

a consecutive and ordered fashion following the principles of common logic. They are intended for communications meant to be understood literally. On the other hand, the nondiscursive symbolic forms aim at conveying figurative meanings, expressing personal subjectivity and appeal more to the imagination than to consecutive argument. Meanings are presented as a unitary vision and are grasped immediately, hence the notion of *presentational immediacy* as a characteristic of such a language form. These forms include:

Signals as codes for communicating action-cues. In every society, every person must master a large vocabulary of conventional signals for safe and efficient adaptation to his/her environment. These include light signals, sound signals and feeling signals many of which turn out to be regulatory and protective. The role of protection was and is still dominant in societies where man lives closer to nature so he learns the danger signals that tell of the approaching snake. With more and more mechanization of the industrial and technologised society, the signals are increasingly regulatory: the factory whistle, the street light, the train whistle. Some signals are natural rather than conventional (the barking dog, the cat with his back arched dangerously, thunder peal). Such signals, although in the strictest sense of language, is not communication between human beings, do become part of one's education as one learns to read the meanings communicated by animals and natural events. Among human beings one very effective and subtle signal cue is the use of space in relation to one another. This phenomenon, also known as *proxemics* (Hall) has been shown to have strong cultural determinants. Personal spacing is used to express respect between the young and the old, between the ordinary and the revered. In his study Willis found systematic evidence to support an often reported phenomenon, that in a conversational group whites stood closer to other whites than to blacks.

Bodily Gestures. These modes, which include *facial expressions* cover a wide range and have several different and very effective communicative functions in both formal and informal dialogue settings. They may be signals in the case of the child who wishes to speak and raises her hand for recognition by the teacher. They may be symptoms, as when a person cringes with pain or leaps with excitement. Many symptomatic gestures are natural rather than conventional and so tend to be similar with similar meanings across cultures. When one clenches one's fist in frustration or defiance such a gesture is truly symbolic and is expressing some ideated meaning in which the distinctively human powers of imagination, self consciousness and deliberation meet and intermingle. The expression is communicated by *direct presentation.*

In addition to being expressive forms in and of themselves, bodily gestures and facial expressions are important accessories to speech, even sometimes taking its place as in the case of the deaf-mute. It follows, therefore, that the mastery of language should extend beyond the acquisition of vocabulary, understanding and skill in grammatical construction, mathematical problem solving, spoken and written language forms to include practice in the many and subtle modes of bodily expression so that a person may be better able to articulate nondiscursive as well as discursive meanings. It is also through an elaboration of this nondiscursive language form, more popularly known as body language or *kinesics* (Birdwhistell), that manners and customs of a cultural group are constructed and elaborated.

In their study of cultures, anthropologists have shown that a primary requirement for learning a particular cultural/ethnic/social group's customs is to have an attitude of interest in, respect for and attentiveness to other peoples and *their ways* (Hall). In a survey of twelve civilizations from China to nineteenth century Germany and England Nicholson showed the centrality of the

understanding of expressions of manners and customs as a key to understanding each civilization.

Rituals. Rituals tend to be more stylized and formalized than both signals and gestures and as symbols, are intended to express meanings at a somewhat deeper level. Although in our very literal-minded modern society, we tend to denigrate rituals and see them almost as superstitions of a less schooled people and age, the fact is that all momentous experiences in our private and public lives are still celebrated through ritual. Some examples are birth, death, marriage, war. Ritual activities continue to be used to express our hopes, dreams, fears, commitments. In our school curriculum what attention is given to the importance of the symbolic forms through which parts of the human personality is indeed nurtured and some of our cultural values are conserved and enriched?

Dreams and Myths are also classes of nondiscursive symbolic language forms which are significant. Myths, and to some extent dreams (in its interpretation) communicate their meanings through ordinary language in extraordinary ways in order to impart figurative and metaphorical rather than literal sense.

Thus far I have been saying that non verbal talk is indeed a legitimate language form for study which may be characterized as being nondiscursive, symbolic, imaginative and metaphorical. It communicates distinctive and essential patterns of meanings that are culturally mediated. A body of knowledge, a distinctive subject matter exists. Representative ideas and methods of inquiry into that body of knowledge can be indicated. Hence we have a firm basis for intentional inclusion in our schools' curriculum.

JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION IN THE CURRICULUM

Reference has been made earlier to studies of cultural anthropolgists

who perceive that an important aspect of being educated is being able to accept and understand the conventions that express the customs, manners, soul of a group of people. Many of these expressions are communicated through signals, gestures, facial expressions, use of personal space, use of ritualistic objects. Wherein groups of people with different cultural, ethnic and social heritages comingle as is the case in a growing pluralistic society, such types of knowledge become increasingly necessary for meaningful dialogue and healthy interaction. Attention to this aspect of our curriculum could serve to enrich ourselves by furthering our understanding of one another and minimising some of the *faux pas* that occur repeatedly between adults in social situations and between teachers and students in the more formal schooling situations. How often have we heard of the incident of the North American Caucasian teacher who mistakes his Chinese student's bowed head and protracted silence as a show of ignorance when it is instead a mark of respect! How many Canadian instructors in Canadian colleges and universities comprehend the agony of the West Indian students whom they insist should call them by their first names! How many well meaning American teachers serving in the classrooms of Caribbean and African countries realise the dissonance, even the havoc, created in their youngsters minds when they accept and encourage the boys and girls to sit when speaking to the teacher in class!

Perhaps because much of our non verbal behaviour is "caught" rather than "taught" awareness is only heightened when we move among groups of people differing somewhat from ourselves. We also tend to be unaware of how much of our communication is mediated nonverbally. Brown and Keller contends that this form of communication is not only important by itself, but guides the interpretation of the verbal code and thus is the more important part of information processing. Birdwhistell notes that as much as 65% of the social meaning in

a dialogue is carried by the non-verbal word, 35% by the words spoken. Yet in our schooling enterprise we spend far more time on instruction for that 35%! This observation recognizes the instructional time devoted to the "arts" which segment of the curriculum does communicate meanings through the non-discursive symbolic form.

Byers' view of a person as striving to develop his consciousness in concert with other human persons underscores the need for communication on two levels: talk with words used for some kinds of information and talk with non-words used for expressing meanings about basic human matters, real and essential stuff. These non words lay in the communication areas of *kinesics* (body language) and *proxemics* (use of personal and environmental space). Given the goals of our education system with respect to development of the *person* (Ministry of Education, Ontario) in terms of self knowledge, it would seem justifiable to include intentionally, in our curriculum ordered experiences that would lead towards a greater understanding of such communication modes as:

Gestures	- motions of hand, arms, feet, face, head, nod, smile, frown, grimace, wave, kick.
Eyes	- focus, contact, sudden shifts, stare
Posture	- slump, sitting upright, shoulders hunched, leaning, slouching, sudden shifts in body stance.
Touch	- hand shake (weak, strong, warm), touch on the shoulder, embrace, pat
Space Use	- close or open space between teacher and student, between two conversationalists, move away from, move towards, lean towards, withdraw quickly, move suddenly in the opposite direction.

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHER

Given Ontario's goals of education for its citizenry, its schools' curriculum would be incomplete without opportunities for meaningful encounters with nonverbal language through the realms of aesthetics (visual arts, music, dancing) and symbolics, which latter realm is the focus of this paper.

As young children learn the spoken and written language, they also learn rhythm patterns that are reflected in vocal and body motions. They learn to attach meanings to events by listening to and watching for teacher signals and peer signals. As they grow physically, emotionally and academically, they acquire skills in these areas at increasingly sophisticated and subtle levels.

The teacher, therefore, has a definite responsibility for helping his/her students, throughout the schooling years, to acquire and use nonverbal language appropriately. Hennings (1977) suggests that there are three areas in which skills can be developed and therefore taught:

1. Physical Expressive Skills (gestures, facial expressions, relating gestures to gross body movements, controlling nervous mannerisms, using eyes to regulate conversation, using body movements to get attention.
2. Vocal Expressive Skills (varying voice pitch to show feelings, controlling voice volume to startle, get attention, emphasize, using pause).
3. Interpretational Skills (reading gestures, facial expressions, messages sent through use of space and time, perceiving actual meanings beneath facades, perceiving new meanings to already known signals and actions).

However in order to teach for the development of these skills, teachers and educators need to know their own nonverbal behaviour and learn ways of modifying them for the desired effect. The film, "Body Language in the

Classroom" (Wolfgang, 1974) illustrates very well the range of cues which the teacher uses in the classroom to support instructional and management motions. The film shows that good teachers use gestures for emphasis, smile frequently, move about the class easily, attend to students by using eye contact and body posture, use signals to dispense quickly with management routines.

This same range of cues, reinforced by additional meanings provided by knowledge of cultural variants can be used to facilitate communication and understanding in classrooms with youngsters from differing cultural and ethnic groups. One sure way of teachers becoming more competent and confident in this area of their job is by increasing their own skills of observation, so we listen and watch more carefully as our youngsters do.

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